

St. Cloud State University

The Repository at St. Cloud State

Culminating Projects in Child and Family
Studies

Department of Child and Family Studies

8-2023

Challenges Faced with the Identification of English Language Learners in Special Education

Emily Fogel

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cfs_etds

Recommended Citation

Fogel, Emily, "Challenges Faced with the Identification of English Language Learners in Special Education" (2023). *Culminating Projects in Child and Family Studies*. 43.
https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cfs_etds/43

This Starred Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Child and Family Studies at The Repository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Culminating Projects in Child and Family Studies by an authorized administrator of The Repository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu.

Challenges Faced with the Identification of English Language Learners in Special Education

By

Emily Fogel

A Starred Paper

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

In Early Childhood Special Education

August 2023

Starred Paper Committee:
Frances Kayona, Chairperson
Ana Welu
Ahmet Simsar

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	4
Background of the Study	4
English Language Learners	5
Academic Needs	5
Referral Process	6
Special Education	6
Family Relationships	7
Importance of Study	7
Research Questions	8
Literature Search Description	9
Definition of Terms	9
II. Literature Review	11
Early Childhood Special Education Program Overview	11
ECSE Assessment and Evaluation Policies/Procedures	12
ECSE Assessment Validity/Test Bias	12
Challenges Teachers Face with Identification/Misidentification	13
Challenges Students Face with Identification/Misidentification	14
Grade Level Identification	15
Essential Knowledge and Skills for Profession	16
Understanding Language Development	17
Relationship Between Language and Culture	17

Chapter	Page
Skills and Abilities to Effectively Teach ELL Students.....	18
Meaningful Assessment	18
Developing Professionalism.....	19
Working With Families	19
Literature Review Summary	20
III. Results	21
Conclusions	21
Recommendations for Research.....	24
Recommendations for Practice.....	25
Final Thoughts and Reflections.....	25
References	27

Chapter I: Introduction

This starred paper is written to further explore the specific challenges and obstacles educators face with the identification of English language learners in special education settings. This study will specifically examine the issues around the disproportionality when identifying multi language learners who are first generation family members to experience a public-school learning environment in the United States. This study will add to our understanding of public-school processes and procedures that pertain to the identification of English language learners in special education settings. This study will investigate why misidentification is happening and how as a field it can be addressed.

Background of the Study

Concerns regarding the disproportionate designation of various student categories into special education by race or ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic level, and English language learner (ELL) status have existed for several decades (Umansky et al., 2017). Researchers have discovered disparities for English language learners and students who identify as people of color, raising important questions about educational equity (Skiba, 2008 as cited in Umansky et al., 2017). Despite variation, prior research has identified certain patterns. Students of these groups are commonly disproportionately identified in the form of overrepresentation or underrepresentation. Overrepresentation implies that more members of a given subgroup may be recognized as needing special education services than need them. This is likely to have an impact on these students' educational prospects and experiences by limiting access to challenging academic content (Bianco, 2005 as cited in Umansky et al., 2017). On the opposite side, underrepresentation implies that fewer students from a specific subgroup may be identified and not receive special education services,

limiting access to vital educational support for students who are needing these services (Umansky et al., 2017).

English Language Learners

According to the US Department of Education (2020), an English language learner is described as a national-origin-minority student who has limited-English-proficiency. Commonly, students who are identified as an English language learner are often learning English as a second language. Children of immigrant families are the fastest growing population in the United States. In 2003, an estimated 33.5 million people, or nearly 12 percent of the U.S. population, was foreign-born (Larsen, 2004). Nearly 20 years later in 2022 an estimated 87.7 million immigrants and their U.S.-born children make close to 27 percent of the U.S. population in the 2022. That is an increase of approximately 54.2 million from 2003 (Batalova & Ward, 2023). An increase of such significance is indicative of many more students being an English language learner as they enter the school system.

Academic Needs

Students with limited English proficiency may communicate in social circumstances with peers and adults in English in as little as one to two years, but this is not true of their ability to read and write in English (Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003). The skills necessary to be cognitively and academically proficient in English may take as long as five to eight years to develop, according to research. Children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds commonly fail early developmental tests given that it can be challenging to discriminate between learning impairments and cultural and linguistic developmental challenges (De Valenzuela et al., 2006). Even after the initial adjustment period, children may continue to learn at a slower pace, due to language

differences or unfamiliar teaching styles, sometimes resulting in referrals to special education services. (Barrera et al. 2003).

Referral Process

The referral process often begins when a teacher in the classroom requests a referral after becoming concerned about a pupil's lack of academic success, behavior, or both (Algozzine et al.,1982). The teacher typically discusses the pupil with their colleagues as a first step at a school-level pre-referral meeting. This group of educators are frequently known as a child study team. During this conversation team members provide recommendations to the teacher to help the student. Once the student has been observed for a predetermined amount of time, a second child study team meeting is scheduled, at which point the team reflects on the information collected and determines whether to refer the pupil for a formal evaluation (Klingner & Harry, 2006). In cases that are deemed severe, the team may decide a second child study meeting is not needed and start an immediate referral for a formal evaluation for a prospective placement in special education. Placement conferences, also known as multidisciplinary team meetings, IEP meetings, or staffing conferences, are held after the evaluation is finished and a report has been completed. Whether the child is eligible for special education services is decided at this point (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that was enacted on November 29, 1975. The stated purpose of the IDEA is to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). IDEA requires states to develop policies and procedures to prevent over-identification or disproportionate

representation of children by race/ethnicity in their special education programs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). IDEA also ensures that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities, coordinated research and personnel preparation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Family Relationships

Over the last forty years, a multitude of national and international studies have demonstrated unequivocally the critical role of the family in terms of educational performance in order to support their child better. Collaboration between schools and families must begin with positive and constructive relationships between teachers and parents that are informed, cooperative, and founded on mutual trust and respect (Deslandes et al.,2015). Inadequate techniques are one of the most prominent issues associated with parental engagement in the referral, evaluation, and placement process include: 1) determining cultural and linguistic differences that contribute to or inhibit communication between parents and professionals, 2) obtaining information from families through culturally sensitive methods, 3) communication of evaluation results and placement possibilities with families within a culturally relevant framework, and 4) developing and sustaining culturally acceptable methods of communication with families when a child begins receiving special education services (Barrera et al., 2003).

Importance of the Study

This study is significant because educators are working with English Language Learners at an increasing rate. A key difficulty for the United States' prekindergarten-12 education system is that as the population changes, so do the individual needs of children. The substantial growth in the number of children in public schools who speak English as a second language has been one of the

most significant demographic changes during the last 10 years (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction, 2007). Many of these children are born in the United States and thus from a very young age are acquiring both their home language of their family as well as the language of the larger community. Educators would benefit from understanding the underlying principles of language development and language as a communication system in order to accomplish the rising expectations of performance in school (TESOL Task Force on ESL Standards, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this starred paper is to examine the policies and procedures used to evaluate and identify English Language Learners (ELLs) in special education, challenges teachers are facing with the disproportionality of identification of ELLs in special education, challenges students face with being misidentified and at what grade level is misidentification more likely to occur.

Research Questions

The research questions for this Starred Paper literature review entails the following:

1. What are the policies and procedures used to evaluate and identify English Language Learners in Special Education?
2. What are the challenges teachers are facing with the disproportionality of identification of English language learners in Special Education?
3. What are the challenges students face with being misidentified as English Language Learner in Special Education?
4. At what grade level is misidentification more likely to occur when identifying English Language Learners in Special Education?

Literature Search Description

The Literature Review in Chapter Two is designed to incorporate findings from a multitude of studies. The review of literature is primarily designed to answer the research questions posed above. EBSCO Host: Academic Search Premier and Google Scholar were used to discover articles. Keywords used to search included: English Language Learner, Early Childhood Special Education, Dual Language Learner, Family Relationships, Special Education. The major authors used in this search that had a significant impact on forming the conceptual framework for this study are Ilana Umansky, Karen Thompson, Guadalupe Diaz, Janette Klingner, Beth Harry. The journals used for this search primarily are the Council for Exceptional Children, Assessment for Effective Intervention, Educational Researcher, Child Development Perspectives.

Definition of Terms

Disproportionality- “An individual from a given subgroup having a higher or lower likelihood of being identified in a category than what would be expected given that subgroups representation in the overall population” (Coutinho & Oswald, 2006).

Overrepresentation- “The representation of a group in a category that exceeds the expectations for that group or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category” (Bianco, 2005).

Underrepresentation- “The representation of a group in a category that inadequately represents the expectations for that group or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category” (Wagner et al., 2005).

English Language Learner- “English Language Learner is a national-origin-minority student who has limited-English-proficiency” (US Department of Education, 2020).

Part C Services- “A state program providing services for children birth through two years of age experiencing delays in their development and who meet state eligibility criteria. Eligible children and their families receive services such as special instruction, physical/occupational/speech therapy, family support and service coordination” (Help Me Grow, 2023).

Part B Services- “Services that are provided by school districts that are designed to enable young children with developmental delays, ages three to five, to be active and successful participants during the early childhood years and in the future in a variety of settings. These services are designed to meet the needs of preschool children who meet state education criteria for developmental delay or disability and are experiencing challenges in their learning and development. Services are individually tailored to meet the unique learning needs of each child” (Help Me Grow, 2023).

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this review of the literature is to examine challenges faced with the misidentification of English Language Learners in special education. In addition, this paper will address educator challenges, educator preparation; and to determine what can be done as a field to limit misidentification of English Language Learners in early childhood.

Early Childhood Special Education Program Overview

Early childhood special education is often used to define programs and supports that assist infants and young children with developmental delays or disabilities as well as their families. Positive early educational experiences are detrimental prerequisites for success in future educational careers, the workforce, and the community (Goode et al., 2011). Programming can include speech therapy, physical therapy and other types of services based on the individual needs of the child and the family. Studies have demonstrated that services provided to infants and young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays have improved outcomes across developmental domains. There are six domains of a child's development which include cognitive, communication, social- emotional, adaptive and motor (gross and fine) are covered by developmental milestones. Milestones give parents insight into their child's development and learning (Help Me Grow, 2023). For parents and professionals interested in the developmental growth of infants and young children, each state and territory within the United States has programs available. Locally, Help Me Grow contains a vast wealth of resources available to families, professionals and educators. The resources available contain details on developmental milestones as well as educational videos, caregiver support tactics, communication techniques, screening and evaluation. Early childhood special education benefits families by allowing them to better address their children's individual needs from an early age and throughout their lives (Help Me Grow, 2023).

ECSE Assessment and Evaluation Policies/Procedures

When a child is referred to Help Me Grow the local school district will contact the family to set up a screening or evaluation to see if the child qualifies for services such as Infant and Toddler Intervention (PART C) or Preschool Special Education (Part B). Children who qualify after an evaluation will receive services for free regardless of immigration status or income (Help Me Grow, 2023). A study was completed by 141 early childhood administrators and educators to investigate their views about the policies and procedures during the special education referral, evaluation, and placement process for preschool ELLs and their families. The survey questions were aimed to elicit information concerning how cultural and language differences were addressed through the evaluation process, what strategies were used to ensure parent participation and what training is available to educators and utilized (Hardin et al., 2007). The participants of this study completed an in-depth survey, and their results were recorded.

The results of the study indicated that methods used to determine home language and English proficiency were inconsistent. This study suggests that there is a lack of clarity about the objective of the instruments used to assess and evaluate English Language Learning students. It also demonstrated the importance of cultural liaisons who are trained in early childhood terminology and the special education process. Furthermore, this study demonstrated a need for screening and assessment tools that are reliable and valid in a range of languages (Hardin et al., 2007).

ECSE Assessment Validity/Test Bias

A culturally valid assessment is a process that considers cultural values and conventions, as well as English as a second language development, in the selection and administration of assessment devices and procedures, as well as the scoring, interpretation, and utilization of assessment scores (Hoover et al., 2007). Overall, culturally valid assessments are consistent, fair, as

well as an appropriate method for diverse learners (Solano-Flores, 2006). Standardized assessments frequently possess strong psychometric properties for some students, notably those who speak English as their first language and come from mainstream backgrounds, due to how they are created. However, these same measures tend to underestimate English Language Learners' intellect and achievement and lack the predictive and construct validity that they demonstrate with English-only students (Abedi, 2002).

Challenges Educators Face with Identification/Misidentification

When educational institutions collaborate with families to support learning, students tend to succeed not just in their academic career, but throughout their entire life (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Families coming from a diverse community often face the predictable challenges faced by the educator and parent relationship. Those challenges are often compounded by differences in languages, culture and tradition (PACER Center, 2015). Educators are often faced with a variety behaviors of English Language Learner students within their classroom. When young English Language Learners (ELLs) begin the formal education process in the United States, many students' life experiences, rules, and norms are new to them; ELLs have distinctive language, family, and cultural backgrounds and life histories (Hooper et al., 2016) Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills suited for the United States school system is especially new to ELLs since social-emotional abilities are socio-culturally embedded (Guerrero, 2004). A study completed on social norms was implemented by interviewing six educators with extensive experience of English Language Learners (Hyonsuk et al., 2019). The six participants included three 1st-grade teachers, two kindergarten teachers, and one ELL teacher. The study conducted in-depth interviews with the teacher participants and the results reported.

The results indicated that in the beginning of the academic year, some of the English Language Learners had limited to no awareness of educational social norms and rules including lining up, asking for help, raising their hand and making eye contact. The educators interviewed stated the English Language Learning students had difficulty interacting with their peers or acted in ways which differed from their peers. It was also reported that some ELL students demonstrated limited abilities to control or regulate their emotions, attention and behaviors. This study suggests that creating classroom environments in which there is respect for English Language Learners (McBrien, 2005). Furthermore, in order to make room for cultural variety in SEL development, it is suggested that teachers use age-appropriate and culturally relevant stories as a foundation for in-depth explorations of social and emotional norms (Hyonsuk et al., 2019).

Challenges Students Face with Identification/Misidentification

Emotions influence how and what we learn as well as shaping the learning process (Zins & Elias, 2006). Children learn to notice differences at a young age. According to studies, average children begin to classify others as disabled or nondisabled around the age of 5, albeit their knowledge of the impairment is primarily dependent on physical and action indications that they encounter, such as someone being unable to walk (Lewis, 1993). When young children start making social comparisons and forming social categories, they also start attaching value judgments based on their own experiences and the attitudes of others (Cunningham & Glenn, 2004). A study completed by Reginald L. Jones in 1972 where a group of 139 student's perceptions of being identified as disabled and placed in special education classrooms was investigated. The results indicated that many of the students reported feeling embarrassed about being placed in special education classes and not wanting other pupils to see them there; being teased; lying about what classes they are attending; having difficulty keeping a significant other; and being concerned about

negative effects on postsecondary job placement. Children who can manage or regulate their emotions are more likely to adapt to school and attain higher levels of academic accomplishment (Bierman et al.,2008).

English language students who are misidentified and are receiving special education services typically receive rigorous instructional support that is targeted to their specific level of needs. Although there are advantages to getting this type of services, there are also disadvantages. Disability labels often stigmatize pupils and lead to reduced expectations from teachers, parents, and students themselves (Zehler & Fleischman, 2003). Lowering expectations of these students lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and a sense of learned helplessness. Furthermore, special education programming may isolate students from their peers and limit their access to the mainstream educational curriculum. Special education placement when misidentified may result in improper services that may not meet the student's level of needs, resulting in poor educational and long-term life results (Patton, 1998). Furthermore, English language learners in special education are less likely to receive language support services and have instructional materials be given to them in English than English language learners who are in the mainstream classroom (Zehler & Fleischman, 2003).

Grade Level Identification

For more than three decades, the disproportionate representation of English Language Learners has negatively impacted the special education field (Artile & Klinger, 2006). Dunn (1968) first documented the extent to which culturally and linguistically diverse students were overrepresented in special education programs in 1968, educators, researchers, and policymakers have fought to minimize overrepresentation. Longitudinal studies have been conducted over a 20-year span by the National Research Council (NRC) and investigated disproportionate identification.

Despite these numerous studies, as well as resolutions, statements, and actions from major professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2002), litigation (e.g., court cases such as Larry P. v. Riles, 1984 and Diana v. the California State Board of Education, 1970), policy changes (e.g., IDEA), a federally funded technical assistance center (i.e., the National Center for Culturally Responsive Education Systems), little has changed.

A study was conducted examining 11 urban school district databases in the state of California. These databases examined and calculated many indicators of disproportionate representation by disability, grade level, language proficiency, social class, language support and special education programs. The study's target group consisted of English Language Learners, and they were compared to their English proficient counterparts. The results were recorded as follows, English Language Learners in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade were often underrepresented in special education services, however they were overrepresented beginning in grade six (Artiles et al., 2005). A downward trend was discovered in grade nine but began increasing after in the remaining grades all the way up to grade twelve. Overall, results suggest that younger English Language Learners are less likely to be underrepresented versus older students (Artiles et al., 2005).

Essential Knowledge and Skills for Profession

The quality of early childhood education programs is directly linked to the preparation courses that are taken by educators (Zepeda et al., 2011). Nationwide, an increasing percentage of students live in families where English is not the primary language of the family, and this trend is expected to rise. An increase of such significance is indicative of many more students being an English language learner as they enter the school system and educators working with these students on a more frequent basis.

Understanding Language Development

Early childhood educators must have a fundamental knowledge of the underlying mechanisms guiding language development and recognize language as a system of communication in order to fulfill the rising standards for language and literacy success in preschool. Additionally, for early educators to make informed pedagogical decisions, they must be aware of the stages of second language acquisition as young children acquire English. According to Maxwell and Lim, 2006, a national study of early childhood teacher preparation found that curricular content focused on working with bilingual children was the least likely subject to be covered as a part of practicum in any of the levels of the degrees offered.

Relationship Between Language and Culture

Understanding the relationship between language and culture should be a key part of teacher preparation for working with English Language Learners, just as it is with understanding the fundamental first and second language acquisition. Research has shown that a child's home culture shapes how and when they use language, how a child is recognized as a conversational participant and the significance of language for maintaining a healthy ethnic identity. The home language cultural values and beliefs influence language use as well (Heath, 1989). Educators also need to take into consideration young English Language Learners have the multifaceted task of learning the oral domains and literacy-related domains of a new language at the same time as learning the social rules of interpersonal relationships (Zepeda et al., 2011).

Skills and Abilities to Effectively Teach ELLs

Effective teaching for young English Language Learners requires specific accommodations and modifications that include attention to vocabulary development and intentional focus on the

English language and the development of literacy (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). In general, high-quality instruction is distinguished by better-trained early childhood educators, low child-to-teacher ratios, and increased service intensity (Karoly et al., 2009). Research has also discovered that in order to achieve sustained levels of gains, and in some cases, to achieve the same level of gains as their English-speaking classmates, ELLs may require additional help or instructional accommodations, particularly in classrooms where instruction is given solely in English (Shanahan & Beck, 2006). Another strategy that can be used to support and accommodate is the use of the child's first language when teaching English Language Learners. Using the child's first language will help English Language Learners to comprehend the meaning of concepts and to develop comprehension that they can transfer to vocabulary skills in English (California Department of Education, 2008).

Meaningful Assessments

Learning a second language in early stages of development is a complex process that requires reliable and meaningful assessment of English Language Learners. This is an essential component of teacher preparation courses. Educators must be able to relate stages of second language learning to pedagogical accommodations. Teachers must be aware of crucial elements impacting the process of second language learning because there is considerable variance among ELLs in terms of the rate and way in which they acquire a second language. These include characteristics of the child's age, motivation, personality, and first language abilities (Zepeda et al., 2011). Variables within the school setting include instructional methodologies and teacher preparation, as well as sociocultural issues such as poverty, familial stress, and incongruence between home and school contexts. To accurately comprehend the child's level of conceptual

knowledge in their first and second languages, assessments of young ELLs frequently require involvement from family members and other qualified professionals.

Developing Professionalism

The importance of developing a sense of professionalism is a frequent component in teacher preparation qualifications for early educators. Professionalism is defined as a set of beliefs that guide behavior and practice. According to Goodwin (2002), teacher preparation focused on immigrant students, the majority of whom speak English as a second language, should concentrate on three aspects. First, educators should educate themselves with appropriate resources, publications, and community organizations that can help them understand ELLs. Second, educators must be prepared to learn about the global context of ELL education in order to respond to questions from parents and other professionals and to ethically ground their instructional decisions. Third, teachers should become cognizant of the prejudices that surround ELLs and engage in chances for self-reflection and analysis to overcome the negative preconceptions that frequently characterize ELLs.

Working with Families

Partnerships with families are critical characteristics of high-quality early education programs. Strong communication and collaboration skills are crucial when working with young English Language students to learn about the child and the values and beliefs of the family. Educators need to build a bridge between the home and school cultures to learn about their strengths, expectations, views on their child's development and the child's early experiences in the home (Zepeda et al., 2011).

Literature Review Summary

The review of literature within this chapter indicates that developmental milestones are detrimental to the process of child development. When a child demonstrates delays in an area of development, they typically are referred by a professional to the local school district for further review (Help Me Grow, 2023). Educators work together with the family often through cultural liaisons to best determine the evaluation process, to get the best view of a child's overall skills. Furthermore, studies demonstrated the need for screening and assessment tools that are reliable and valid in a range of languages (Hardin et al., 2007).

The literature revealed that misidentification of English Language Learners in special education has a negative impact on both educators as well as students. Studies show that students who are misidentified are often separated from their same aged peers and the general education curriculum. It was also noted that those students who are receiving services will receive most of their services in English with limited exposure to English Language Learner support (Zehler & Fleischman, 2003). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that educators who are working with students who are misidentified often have lower expectations of these students which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy and a sense of learned helplessness. Socially, students' perceptions of being identified as disabled and placed in special education classrooms reported feeling embarrassed about being in special education classes and don't want their same aged counterparts to know they are receiving services (Jones, 1972).

The literature demonstrates when early childhood educators and service providers are adequately equipped with the skills and knowledge for the profession, they can mitigate the misidentification of English Language Learners within their settings (Zepeda et al., 2011). They can ensure their students feel respected within their classroom environment and culture. Common ways

in which educators can work with English Language Learners and their families is to have a solid understanding language development, understand the relationship between language and culture, develop skills and abilities to teach ELL students, provide meaningful assessments and developing professionalism (Zepeda et al., 2011).

Chapter III: Results

This study is vital due to increasing number of English Language Learners and the negative impacts that it has on families, students and educators. This study examines the policies and procedures used to evaluate and identify English Language Learners. This study further examines the challenges teachers are facing with the misidentification of English Language Learners in special education. This study also details the challenges students face with being misidentified as English Language Learners in special education. It examines at what grade level misidentification is most likely to occur and overall, why it is occurring. The results of this study will help early childhood educators be aware of ways in which they can partner with families when working with young English Language Learners and minimize the misidentification of English Language Learners in special education.

Conclusions

The information from the chapter two literature review was guided by following five questions that will be directly answered below:

1. What are the policies and procedures used to evaluate and identify English Language Learners in Special Education?

Once a child is referred to their local school district a point of contact is made with the families. Depending on the family's spoken language abilities and preferences determine whether a cultural liaison is used (Help Me Grow, 2023). Cultural liaisons connect with the families and assist throughout the entire evaluation process. Once contact is made with the family a plan is set up with a team of members to determine how to get the best overall picture of the child's skills (PACER, 2015). Once the evaluation is completed a meeting is

held with the family to determine the next steps to assist the child in the educational system (Help Me Grow, 2023).

2. What are the challenges teachers are facing with the disproportionality of identification of English language learners in Special Education?

Educators working with Families coming from a diverse community often face the predictable challenges faced by the educator and parent relationship. Those challenges are often compounded by differences in languages, culture and tradition (PACER, 2015).

Educators must take into consideration cultural differences for example in the Somali community, it is better not to initiate a handshake unless the individual extends their hand to you first. Depending on the individual's religious beliefs, physical contact may be inappropriate at certain times. The formal education process in the United States is often different for English Language Learners as, many students' life experiences, rules, and norms are new to them; ELLs have distinctive language, family, and cultural backgrounds and life histories (Hooper et al., 2016). While working with English Language Learners, educators are often faced with a variety of behaviors within their classroom. Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills suited for the United States school system is especially new to ELLs since social-emotional abilities are socio-culturally embedded (Guerrero, 2004). According to Maxwell and Lim, 2006, a national study of early childhood teacher preparation found that curricular content focused on working with bilingual children was the least likely subject to be covered as a part of practicum in any of the levels of the degrees offered. Educators are feeling inadequately prepared to work with English Language Learners going into the field.

3. What are the challenges students face with being misidentified as English Language Learner in Special Education?

Emotions influence how and what we learn as well as shaping the learning process (Zins & Elias, 2006). Children learn to notice differences at a young age. According to studies, average children begin to classify others as disabled or nondisabled around the age of 5, albeit their knowledge of the impairment is primarily dependent on physical and action indications that they encounter, such as someone being unable to walk (Lewis, 1993).

Students whom are misidentified are impacted social emotionally and often are demonstrating behaviors of not wanting their peers to know they are receiving special education services out of fear of what their peers are thinking. Academically expectations of these students are lowered and lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and a sense of learned helplessness. Furthermore, special education programming may isolate students from their peers and limit their access to the mainstream educational curriculum. Special education placement when misidentified may result in improper services that may not meet the student's level of needs, resulting in poor educational and long-term life results (Patton, 1998).

4. At what grade level is misidentification more likely to occur when identifying English Language Learners in Special Education?

For more than three decades, the disproportionate representation of English Language Learners has negatively impacted the special education field (Artiles & Klingler, 2006). Longitudinal studies have been conducted over a 20-year span by the National Research Council (NRC) and investigated disproportionate identification and after much pushback from many different entities very little has changed. Overall research conducted has

demonstrated that English Language Learners are often underrepresented at the elementary age levels including kindergarten through fifth grade (Artiles et al., 2005). Once English Language Learners enter sixth grade the opposite takes place where they are overrepresented. A multitude of studies have demonstrated this pattern. It was also noted that when the students reach the ninth grade there is a dip in identification but continues on an upward trajectory through the completion of high school (Artiles et al., 2005).

Recommendations for Research

There is a need for continued research regarding the special education process on young English Language Learners and what practices early childhood educators are using to best identify students who may demonstrate a level of need for further services. A list of recommendations for future studies is listed below based on identified gaps in the literature that are supported by other researchers.

1. Sample sizes in studies completed in early childhood were small in size. A widespread study with a larger sample size would give more stable results (Hardin et al., 2007).
2. The impact of educator requirements prior to working with English Language Learners and the impact that it has on young students' overall performance (Zepeda et al., 2011).
3. Additional investigation is needed to understand the variables that contribute to disproportionality patterns (Sullivan, 2011).

Recommendations for Practice

As early childhood educators we need to be educated on English language acquisition and the cultural backgrounds of our students so we can best meet the needs of our students and their families. Suggestions for service providers and early childhood educators are as follows:

1. Assessment and Screening tools need to be developed to be given for children whom are English Language Learners (Shepherd et al., 2005). The ability of assessment teams to address these related constraints successfully has a direct impact on culturally sensitive and credible assessment for diverse learners (Hoover et al., 2007).
2. Curriculum content utilized by early childhood programs needs to be developmentally appropriate for English Language Learners (Zepeda et al., 2011).
3. Development of policies at the school level that promote more inclusive treatment of and increased educational outcomes from English Language Learners (Liu et al., 2008).
4. Encourage least restrictive environment to allow access to general education curriculum and accessibility to language supports (Zehler & Fleischman, 2003)
5. Utilize alternative intervention methods prior to referral and given the serious consideration they merit (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

Final Thoughts and Reflections

The author's perspective on the topic is presented in this section of the article. The findings from chapter two, along with my own personal experiences, led to the development of these conclusions.

I believe that English Language Learners and their families are not given the respect they deserve when it comes to their value and cultures in the educational system. Studies have shown that there are often many factors not taken into consideration when assessing and evaluating these

young students. Assessment tools must be created in different languages in order to adequately assess these students and increase validity when determining scores for special education services. When assessments are completed using home languages and valuing a family's culture the assessment process gathers accurate information on the child and their level of needs.

Early childhood education is often the first experience families have with the educational system. Students spend a great deal of time at school over the course of their academic career. Providing educators with adequate training on working with families and building relationships as well as using culturally appropriate curriculum within the school setting would give students the opportunity to grow academically and socially. This could be even more beneficial to families with students that do in fact qualify for special education services. I believe that it is crucial for all schools to respect families' cultures and home languages when working with students and families to encourage healthy relationships throughout the educational process.

References

- Abedi, J. (2002). Standardized achievement tests and English language learners: Psychometric issues. *Educational Assessment*, 8, 231–257.
- Algozzine, B., Christenson, S., & Ysseldyke, J. (1982). Probabilities associated with the referral to placement process. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 5(3), 19-23.
- Artiles, A. J., & Klingner, J. K. (2006). Forging a knowledge base on English language learners with special needs: Theoretical, population, and technical issues. *Teachers College Record*, 108(11), 2187-2194.
- Artiles, A. J., Rueda, R., Salazar, J., & Higaeda, I. (2005). Within-group diversity in minority disproportionate representation: English Language Learners in urban school districts. *Exceptional Children*, 71, 283-300.
- Barrera, I., Corso, R. M., & Macpherson, D. (2003). *Skilled dialogue: Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood*. Brookes Publishing, PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624.
- Batalova, J., & Ward, N. (2023, July 17). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. migrationpolicy.org.
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>
- Bianco, M. (2005). The effects of disability labels on special education and general education teachers' referrals for gifted programs. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28,295-293.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4126967>

- Bierman, K. L., Domitrovich, C. E., Nix, R. L., Gest, S. D., Welsh, J. A., Greenberg, M. T., ... & Gill, S. (2008). Promoting academic and social-emotional school readiness: The Head Start REDI program. *Child development, 79*(6), 1802-1817
- California Department of Education. (2008). *California Preschool Learning Foundations: Volume I*. Sacramento: Author. Retrieved August 1, 2008 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoollf.pdf>
- Coutinho, M.J., & Oswald, D.P. (2006). Disproportionate Representation in Special Education: A Synthesis and Recommendations. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 9*, 135–156. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009462820157>
- Cunningham, C., & Glenn, S. (2004). Self-awareness in Young Adults with Down Syndrome: I. Awareness of Down syndrome and disability. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 51*(4), 335–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912042000295017>
- De Valenzuela, J. S., Copeland, S. R., Qi, C. H., & Park, M. (2006). Examining Educational Equity: Revisiting the Disproportionate Representation of Minority Students in Special Education. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 425–441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200403>
- Deslandes, R., Morin, L., & Barma, S. (2015). Understanding Complex Relationships between Teachers and Parents. *International Journal about Parents in Education, 9*(1),131–144.
- Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded—Is much of it justifiable?. *Exceptional children, 35*(1), 5-22.
- Fillmore, L W., & Snow, C. (2000). *What teachers need to know about language*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics.

- Goode, S., Diefendorf, M., Colgan, S. (2011). *The Importance of Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities*. The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center.
<https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/pubs/outcomesofearlyintervention.pdf>
- Goodwin, A. L. (2002). Teacher preparation and the education of immigrant children. *Education and urban society*, 34(2), 156-172.
- Guerrero, M. (2004). Acquiring academic English in one year: An unlikely proposition for English language learners. *Urban Education Journal*, 39(2), 172–199.
doi:10.1177/0042085903260915
- Hardin, B. J., Roach-Scott, M., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. S. (2007). Special education referral, evaluation, and placement practices for preschool English language learners. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 22(1), 39–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02568540709594611>
- Heath, S. B. (1989). Oral and literate traditions among Black Americans living in poverty. *American Psychologist*, 44(2), 367.
- Help Me Grow MN. (2023). *Glossary for Child Development Terms Refer a Child - Help Me Grow MN*. <https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/index.htm>
- Henderson, A. T., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*.
- Hooper, K., Zong, J., Capps, R., & Fix, M. (2016). *Young children of refugees in the United States: Integration successes and challenges*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- Hoover, J.J. Klingner, J., Baca, L.M., & Patton, J.M. (2007). *Methods for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners*. Columbus, OH: Pearson.

- Hyonsuk, C. Wang, C. & Christ, T. (2019). Social- Emotional Learning of Refugee English Language Learners in Early Elementary Grades: Teachers' Perspectives, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 33, 1, 40-55, DOI: 10.1080/02568543.2018.1531449
- Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (2004), 20 U.S.C. § 1400
- Jones, R. L. (1972). Labels and Stigma in Special Education. *Exceptional Children*, 38(7), 553–564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440297203800705>
- Karoly, L., Zellman, G., & Li, J. (2009). Promoting Effective Preschool Programs. Policy Brief. *RAND Corporation*.
- Klingner, J. K., & Harry, B. (2006). The special education referral and decision-making process for English language learners: Child study team meetings and placement conferences. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 108(11), 2247–2281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810610801109>
- Lake, V. E., & Pappamihel, N. E. (2003). Effective practices and principles to support English language learners in the early childhood classroom. *Childhood Education*, 79(4), 200–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2003.10521193>
- Larsen, L. (2004). *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003* <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2004/demo/p20-551.pdf>
- Lewis, A. (1993). Primary school children's understanding of severe learning difficulties. *Educational Psychology*, 13, 133-14
- Liu, Y.-J., Ortiz, A. A., Wilkinson, C. Y., Robertson, P., & Kushner, M. I. (2008). From early childhood special education to special education resource rooms. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 33(3), 177–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534508407313247>

- Maxwell, K. L., & Lim, C. I. (2006). *Early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States: National report*. FPG Child Development Institute.
- McBrien, J. L. (2005). Educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States: A review of literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 329–364.
doi:10.3102/00346543075003329
- National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction. (2007). *How many school-aged English learners (ELLs) are there in the U.S.?* Washington, DC
- PACER Center (2015). *Getting Off to a Good Start: Positive interactions with diverse families*. Minneapolis, MN
- Patton, J.M. (1998). The disproportionate representation of African-Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions. *Journal of Special Education*, 32, 25–31.
- Shanahan, T., & Beck, I. L. (2006). Effective Literacy Teaching for English-Language Learners. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* (pp. 415–488). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Shepherd, T. L., Linn, D., & Brown, R. D. (2005). The Disproportionate Representation of English Language Learners for Special Education Services Along the Border. *Journal of Social and Ecological Boundaries*, 1(1), 104–116.
- Solano-Flores, G. (2006). Language, dialect, and register: Sociolinguistics and the estimation of measurement error in the testing of English-language learners. *Teachers College Record*, 108(11), 2354–2379.

- Sullivan, A. L. (2011). Disproportionality in special education identification and placement of English language learners. *Exceptional Children*, 77(3), 317–334.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291107700304>
- TESOL Task Force on ESL Standards. (2008). *Standards for the Accreditation for Initial Programs in P-12 ESL Teacher Education*. TESOL International Association Washington, DC
- Umansky, I. M., Thompson, K. D., & Díaz, G. (2017). Using an ever-English learner framework to examine disproportionality in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 84(1), 76–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917707470>
- US Department of Education (ED). (2020, January 16). *Developing ell programs: Glossary*.
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/glossary.html>
- Wagner, R. K., Francis, D. J., & Morris, R. D. (2005). Identifying English language learners with learning disabilities: Key challenges and possible approaches. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 6-15.
- Zehler, A. M., & Fleischman, H. L. (2003). *The Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students and LEP Students with Disabilities*. Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for LEP Students. Arlington, VA: Development Associates, Inc.
- Zepeda, M., Castro, D. C., & Cronin, S. (2011). Preparing early childhood teachers to work with Young Dual Language Learners. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(1), 10–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2010.00141.x>
- Zins, J.E., & Elias, M.J., (2006). *Social and emotional learning In Bear GG, & Minke KM (Eds.), Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention (pp. 1–13)*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.